

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 IO-13 OMB-01 TRSE-00 EB-07 /087 W
-----151322Z 055928 /41

P R 151230Z JAN 77
FM AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4810
INFO AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM
AMEMBASSY GABORONE
AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
AMEMBASSY LILONGWE
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO
AMEMBASSY MASERU
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
USIA WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L LUSAKA 0119

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PINS, PROP, ZA
SUBJ: UNIP COMPLETES TAKEOVER OF THE TIMES OF ZAMBIA AND
REPLACES TOP STAFF

REF: LUSAKA 3492 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: UNIP HEADQUARTERS ANNOUNCED JAN 12 THAT THE PARTY
HAD TAKEN OVER COMPLETE FINANCIAL CONTROL OF THE DAILY
TIMES OF ZAMBIA AND THE SUNDAY TIMES -- A PROCESS BEGUN IN
1975. ALSO ANNOUNCED WERE THE DESIGNATION OF A NEW
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, REAPPOINTMENT OF THE FORMER DEPUTY
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, AND DISMISSAL OF FOUR OTHER TOP STAFF.
THE COMPLETION OF THE TAKEOVER HAS SPARKED SPECULATION THAT
THE DAYS OF EITHER THE TIMES OR DAILY MAIL MAY BE
NUMBERED. THE EVENTUAL DEMISE OF ONE OF THE DAILIES WOULD
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BE WELCOMED BY SOME IN PARTY AND GOVERNMENT CIRCLES WHO
FAVOR A MORE CONTROLLED MEDIA. THE CHANGES AT THE TOP
HAVE BOTH A FAVORABLE AND UNFAVORABLE ASPECT REGARDING
FUTURE TREATMENT OF US IN THE TIMES. IF THERE IS
TIGHT PARTY CONTROL AND MONITORING OF THE TIMES, THIS WOULD
REMOVE FROM THE LOCAL SCENE A PARTIALLY FREE SOURCE OF COMMENT
AND CRITICISM OF THE GRZ AND PARTY, SOMETHING HARMFUL TO THE

COUNTRY IN THE LONG RUN. END SUMMARY.

1. THE PROCESS LEADING TO THE PARTY'S COMPLETE FINANCIAL TAKEOVER ON JAN 12 OF THE TIMES BEGAN IN 1975 WHEN IT PURCHASED A CONTROLLING SHARE OF 60 PERCENT FROM A LOCAL SUBSIDIARY OF LONRHO. IT WAS ASSUMED LOCALLY THAT THE TIMES WAS SUBJECT TO PARTY GUIDANCE SINCE THAT DATE. HOWEVER, ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS IT WAS CLEAR THAT THE TIMES' EDITORS FELT FREE TO DIFFER WITH PARTY POLICY AND EVEN WITH THE GOVERNMENT. AN EXAMPLE OF THIS WAS THE PARTY'S AND GOVERNMENT'S RECENT DISSOCIATION FROM THE TIMES' EDITORIAL CRITICISM OF OTHER SOUTHERN AFRICAN COUNTRIES (REFTEL).

2. THE TAKEOVER ANNOUNCEMENT WAS FOLLOWED BY HIGH-LEVEL PERSONNEL CHANGES IN THE TIMES ORGANIZATION. SHUFFLED OUT AS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF WAS MILIMO PUNABANTU, PRESIDENT KAUNDA'S PERSONAL CHOICE FOR THE POST, WHOSE CONTRACT EXPIRED DEC 31, 1976. PUNABANTU WILL BE REPLACED BY JOHN MUSUKUMA, ONE-TIME ASSISTANT EDITOR OF THE DAILY MAIL, LATER EDITOR OF THE WEEKLY MINING MIRROR AND MOST RECENTLY PERSONNEL SUPERINTENDENT OF ROAN CONSOLIDATED COPPER MINES. RETURNING TO THE DEPUTY EDITOR-IN-CHIEF SLOT, WHICH HAS BEEN VWCANT SINCE HIS DISMISSAL BY PRESIDENT KAUNDA FOR DEVIATION FOR PARTY POLICIES IN 1976, IS WILLIAM SAIDI. FOUR OTHER SENIOR JOURNALISTS, AN ASSISTANT EDITOR, CHIEF REPORTER AND TWO SENIOR REPORTERS WERE ALSO DROPPED.

COMMENT: LOCAL OBSERVERS SEE THE PARTY'S COMPLETE TAKEOVER
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OF THE TIMES AS TAKING A FURTHER STEP TOWARD THE EVENTUAL DEMISE OF EITHER THE DAILY MAIL OR THE TIMES. BOTH PAPERS ARE IN FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES. THE PARTY DOES NOT HAVE FUNDS TO SUBSIDIZE THE TIMES ON ITS OWN, AND CAN BE EXPECTED TO ASK THE GRZ FOR MONEY TO SUPPORT THAT NEWSPAPER. GIVEN THE GRZ'S FINANCIAL STRAITS, IT MIGHT DECIDE THAT TWO PAPERS ARE A LUXURY IT CANNOT AFFORD. THE DEMISE OF ONE OF THE DAILIES WOULD BE WELCOMED BY THOSE IN PARTY AND GOVERNMENT CIRCLES WHO WANT TO CONTROL THE MEDIA MORE CLOSELY IN ORDER TO INSURE THAT THERE IS NO BOTHERSOME CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT AND PARTY POLICIES. THIS IS SHORT SIGHTED. A RELATIVELY FREE PRESS HAS BEEN A SOURCE OF STRENGTH FOR ZAMBIA, HELPING TO KEEP BOTH PARTY AND GOVERNMENT FROM TAKING FOOLISH ACTIONS. HOPEFULLY, PARTY CONTROL OF THE TIMES WILL TURN OUT TO BE AS HAPHAZARD AS IT HAS IN THE PAST. THIS WOULD PERMIT THE TYPE OF HEALTHY CRITICISM OF THE PARTY AND GOVERNMENT IN WHICH THE TIMES HAS ENGAGED TO CONTINUE. JUST HOW THE US WILL FARE UNDER THE TIMES' NEW LEADERSHIP AND, THEORETICALLY, MORE COMPLETE PARTY CONTROL IS UNCERTAIN. THE NEW EDITOR-IN-CHIEF IN THE PAST

HAS NOT BEEN ILL-DISPOSED TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES, BUT HIS
RESURRECTED DEPUTY HAS A HISTORY OF BEING ANTAGONISTIC TOWARDS
THE US AND ITS POLICIES. OF COURSE, THE PREVAILING ATTITUDE
TOWARD THE US IN THE PRESS WILL CONTINUE TO BE INFLUENCED BY
THE GRZ'S ATTITUDE AS IT HAS IN THE PAST. LOW

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: GOVERNMENT MONOPOLIES, POLITICAL PARTIES, NEWSPAPERS, REORGANIZATIONS, PERSONNEL SEPARATIONS, INFORMATION CONTROL
Control Number: n/a
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Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977LUSAKA00119
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770016-0284
Format: TEL
From: LUSAKA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770148/aaaabqbl.tel
Line Count: 121
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 1ee9f2d8-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 LUSAKA 3492
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 30-Nov-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3588720
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: UNIP COMPLETES TAKEOVER OF THE TIMES OF ZAMBIA AND REPLACES TOP STAFF
TAGS: PINT, PINS, PROP, ZA
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/1ee9f2d8-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009